

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 4077

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CVIS, BTRA, PFOR, BU

SUBJ: NEW COMMERCIAL VISITOR VISA PROCEDURES

REF: (A) WARSAW 5090; (B) ANDREWS-BARNES LETTER 8/22; (C) SOFIA 1576

1. SUMMARY: WE HAVE REVIEWED WITH CARE THE PROPOSED NEW VISA PROCEDURE FOR BUSINESS VISITORS AND ARE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED AT WHAT WE FORESEE. IN FULL REALIZATION THAT THOSE IN DEPARTMENT HAVE ALREADY FOUGHT A NUMBER OF BATTLES ON THIS SUBJECT, WE URGE THAT SERIOUS EFFORT BE MADE TO MODIFY PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS TO PRESERVE AT LEAST A MODICUM OF APPEARANCES FOR OUR POSITION THAT WE ARE AS EAGER AS EASTERN EUROPEANS ARE TO EXPAND TRADE. IMPOSING THESE RESTRICTIONS WILL BAFFLE ROMANIANS AS NOT FITTING THE CONTEXT OF RECENT EXCHANGES BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND CEAUSESCU'S ENVOY AND ACCEPTING AN INVITATION TO VISIT ROMANIA. END SUMMARY.

2. ENCOURAGING ROMANIAN OFFICIALS TO VISIT FIRMS IN US HAS BEEN A USEFUL ASPECT OF OUR POLICY TO PROMOTE US EXPORTS.

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THE POLICY HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL: US EXPORTS TO ROMANIA IN

THE FIRST HALF OF 1974 WERE LARGER THAN FOR THE WHOLE OF 1973; AND 374 B-1 VISAS WERE ISSUED. BECAUSE OF THEIR INFLEXIBILITY, THE REVISED PROCEDURES FOR PROCESSING COMMERCIAL VISITOR VISAS WILL INTERFERE WITH THIS EFFORT, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE EXPORTS IN WHICH THE US HAS NO TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE.

3. US EXPORTS ARE RELATIVELY NEW AND FACE STRONG COMPETITION IN ROMANIA. THE REQUIREMENT THAT VISITORS SET FORTH AN ITINERARY WITH SPECIFIC CONTACTS WITH EACH FIRM IN THE US PROBABLY WILL CAUSE SOME BUYERS NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE US MARKET TO SHOP ELSEWHERE. THOSE WHO VISIT COMMERCIAL FAIRS IN THE US DO SO IN PART TO FIND OUT WHICH FIRMS THEY NEED TO VISIT. FOREIGN TRADE ORGANIZATION OFFICIALS WHO MAY BE IN THE US TO SELL ROMANIAN PRODUCTS WILL BE DISCOURAGED FROM MAKING SIDE TRIPS TO SEE NEW US PRODUCTS.

4. AS REPORTED EARLIER OUR AVERAGE PROCESSING TIME FOR BUSINESS VISAS IS THREE WORKING DAYS. SINCE NEARLY 99 PERCENT OF ALL COMMERCIAL VISITORS ARE TRAVELING ON THE BASIS OF OFFICIAL SPONSORSHIP, THEY REQUIRE WAIVERS FROM VIENNA. IN URGENT SITUATIONS, HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY HAS BEEN ABLE TO OBTAIN WAIVERS ON SHORTER NOTICE BY CALLING INS VIENNA DIRECTLY. THE ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT IS AWARE OF THIS, AND WILL REGARD A BLANKET THREE-WORKING DAY REQUIREMENT AS A DEFINITE STEP BACKWARDS IN US-ROMANIAN RELATIONS.

5. IN GENERAL IT SEEMS TO US THAT TO EXTENT SECURITY PROBLEMS ARE INHERENT IN GROWING EAST-WEST TRADE, WE THINK IT MORE APPROPRIATE FOR THE RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES TO DEAL WITH THEM DIRECTLY IN THE US, RATHER THAN BY IMPOSING NEW VISA DELAYS. IF SECURITY AGENCIES IN THE US PERCEIVE A SPECIFIC RISK, THEY WOULD STILL HAVE TIME TO WARN AFFECTED US FIRMS.

6. WE ARE ALSO AT A DISADVANTAGE, OF COURSE, BECAUSE WE DO NOT YET KNOW WHAT SORT OF GUIDELINES ARE GOING TO BE SET UP TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN SENSITIVE AND NON-SENSITIVE COMMERCIAL INSTALLATIONS (WE ASSUME INCIDENTALLY CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT THE REFERENCE IN PARA 1 LINE 19 TO PARA 8 SHOULD READ PARA 9 REPEAT 9). AS THE MINIMUM WE PROPOSE FOLLOWING AMENDMENTS TO CURRENTLY PROPOSED PROCEDURES:

7. SOME PROCEDURE IS NEEDED TO GIVE LEGITIMATE BUYERS AND SELLERS THE FLEXIBILITY TO CHANGE THEIR ITINERARY ONCE THEY ARE IN THE US. THE NEW PROCEDURES MAKE NO PROVISION

FOR HIS. IF THE AMOUNT OF DATA COULD BE KEPT AT A MINIMUM, PERHAPS A TOTAL-FREE NUMBER AT THE DEPARTMENT OR AT COMMERCE WOULD BE APPROPRIATE. AT THE VERY LEAST, LEGITIMATE ROMANIAN BUSINESSMEN SHOULD HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY HAVE AS MUCH FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN THE US AS US COMMERCIAL VISITORS HAVE IN ROMANIA. PERHAPS ALSO THE FORMULA USED IN PARAGRAPH 4 FOR SOVIET INTNERARIES COULD BE APPLIED PRIOR TO VISA ISSUANCE -- I.E. PROVIDE GENERAL PURPOSE AND RANGE OF TRAVEL ANTICIPATED.

8. WHILE WE DON NOT HAVE THE MULTIPLE ENTRY VISA SITUATION THAT WARSAW DOES (ROMANIANS REQUIRE NO ADVANCE VISA ISSUANCE FOR US BUSINESS TRAVELLERS) WE ALSO HAVE AN INCREASING NUMBER OF COOPERATION AGREEMENTS. TRAVELLERS FOR SUCH PURPOSES SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE NON-SENSITIVE CATEGORY BY DEFINITION SINCE AMERICAN FIRMS WOULD NOT BE INVOLVED HERE WITHOUT NECESSARY CLEARANCES AT HOME.

9. WE DEFINIELY CONCUR WITH EMBASSY WARSAW'S ASSESSMENT THAT THE COMVIS SHOULD BE REPLACED. WE RECOMMEND A NEUTRAL DESIGNATOR, SUCH AS BUSVIS FOR "BUSINESS VISITOR," PERTICULARLY SINCE OUR OVERALL POLICY IS NOT TO LUMP ALL COMMUNIST NATIONS TOGETHER.

10. THE TIMING OF THE NEW PROCEDURES IS ESPECIALLY BAD SO EARLY IN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. IN ADDITION, ROMANIANS HAVE BEEN PRESSING FOR GREATER OVERALL LIBERALIZATION OF US VISA PROCEDURES O MATCH THEIRS. THE TIGHTENING UP OF VISA REQUIREMENTS RUNS THE RISK OF BEING MISINTERPRETED POLITICALLY. AT THE LEAST, WE OUGHT TO GET POSITIVE ACTION ON THE ROMANIAN PROPOSAL FOR SIMPLIFYING OFFICIEL VISA PROCEDURES SO WE CAN HAND THEM A SEMI-SWEETENED PILL.
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11. IN ANY CASE WE PROPOSE THAT EE POSTS AND MOSCOW BE GIVEN A SUFFICIENT PERIOD TO REVIEW THE FINAL VERSION OF THE REVISED PROCEDURES AND ESPECIALLY THE GUIDELINES ON DEERMINING SENSITIVITY BEFORE THEY GO INTO EFFECT.

12. IN SUM, WE STILL BELIEVE NEW PROCEDURE TO BE ILL-ADVISED, ILL-TIMED AND AN UNWARRANTED REVERSE MOVE IN THIS ERA OF DETENTE. IF ABOVE MODIFICATIONS CAN BE MADE WE MAY AT LEAST HAVE A CHANCE OF LIMITING THE DAMAGE.
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